United Nations

Daily Highlights

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

• General Assembly postpones action on draft resolution dealing with restructuring of United Nations; Colombia, on behalf of "Group of 77", says action should not yet be taken on such important issue.

• World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna considers draft document affirming universality of human rights, right to development and rights of women and minorities.

• Secretary-General arrives in Cairo for OAU Summit; underlines importance of cooperation between United Nations and regional organizations, citing Somalia, Rwanda, Mozambique and Angola.

• Secretary-General expresses concern about shelling of Georgian town of Sukhumi by Abkhaz forces; warns of wider conflagration in Caucasus region; Special Envoy working to bring about cease-fire.

• High-level meeting of Commission on Sustainable Development finds limited progress made since UNCED; United States says it is committed to sustainability; Japan to boost support for sustainable development.

• WHO says cholera pandemic shows no signs of abating; cites global recession as contributory factor.

• UNHCR receives only one quarter of $10 million needed for Togolese refugees in Benin and Ghana; says there is no food in the pipeline for refugees in Ghana, and situation is deteriorating.

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The General Assembly today postponed action on a draft resolution calling for further measures on the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields. By a recorded vote of 70 in favour to 37 against, with 14 abstentions, the Assembly approved a Colombian motion that no action be taken on the draft today. The reforms would have aimed at avoiding duplication of work in the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and enhancing their complementarity.

(more)

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Colombia, on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries, said it was inappropriate to take action at this time on an issue of such importance to the future of the Organization in the economic and social area. In the spirit of cooperation between North and South, which had been evident in the Commission on Sustainable Development, he asked the Assembly not to take action today. However, the United States opposed the Colombian motion, saying the draft included necessary reforms. The United Nations system was in trouble, with declining resources and a loss of credibility and effectiveness in the system as a whole, the United States argued.

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The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, which was scheduled to end today, has been considering a draft final document affirming the universality of human rights, the right to development, the rights of women and minorities and the link between democracy, development and respect for human rights. Also taken into account are indigenous peoples, children and refugees.

When the World Conference began, a consensus on the universality of human rights was in question, with some countries insisting that the human rights values of one country or group could not be imposed on other countries. The Conference has brought together high-level representatives from more than 180 countries and is the first global human rights meeting in 25 years.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali arrived today in Cairo to attend the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Summit, according to a United Nations spokesman. He was received at the airport by Egypt's Foreign Minister and by various United Nations officials.

On arrival, the Secretary-General spoke of the importance of the OAU, citing cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations in such areas as Somalia, Rwanda, Mozambique and Angola. It was anticipated that he would have many bilateral meetings with Heads of State attending the Summit, the spokesman said.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today expressed concern about daily shelling of the Georgian town of Sukhumi by Abkhaz forces, which had caused deaths and injuries among the civilian population, according to a United Nations spokesman. The Secretary-General deplored the attacks, warning that they could lead to escalation and a wider conflagration in Georgia and Caucasus region. He called on all parties to abide by the cease-fire agreed in Moscow on 14 May, and to refrain from any action which could expose the civilian population to further suffering.

The Special Envoy for Georgia is currently undertaking talks to bring about the cease-fire -- working closely with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) -- and will soon report back to the Secretary-General.

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Participants in the two-day high-level meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development agreed that the progress achieved since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) had been limited, Commission Chairman Razali Ismail said yesterday. Participants, including more than 40 environment and development ministers, had emphasized that much more had to be done to put UNCED's commitments into action.

The Chairman said the meeting had underscored the political importance of an effective follow-up to UNCED, and that ministers and other high-level officials had shown a commitment to sustainable development. The Commission's role as a political forum for monitoring and reviewing implementation of "Agenda 21", UNCED's plan of action, had also been highlighted.

The United States said it was committed to changing the course of world economics to fulfil its obligation towards sustainability. It would make strong efforts to "muffle the noise of confrontation" and to join in a world partnership. Japan said it would increase financial support for sustainable development by up to 40 to 50 per cent over the next five years.

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The current cholera pandemic, which has resulted in more than 3 million cases and tens of thousands of deaths around the world since 1961, shows no signs of abating, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The pandemic is thought to be caused by a bacterium which can survive in aquatic environments for long periods, making it unlikely that cholera will soon disappear from affected regions, WHO said. The continuing global recession, which hampers the ability of developing countries to strengthen their health infrastructures, is an important contributing factor.

"Cholera is the litmus test of a country's socioeconomic well-being," according to WHO Director-General Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima. "For as long as there is a lack of proper sanitation facilities and safe drinking-water, epidemics of cholera are bound to return, time and again".

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Despite numerous appeals in the past month, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today said that it had received only one quarter of the $10 million needed to assist 280,000 Togolese refugees in Benin and Ghana. As a result, there was no food in the pipeline for refugees in Ghana for July.

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UNHCR said that the refugee situation in Benin and Ghana was rapidly deteriorating, and warned that further refugee outflows were expected from Togo after a setback last week in peace talks between the Togolese Government and opposition representatives.

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